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INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 7616
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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3077
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ JUN LIMA 2663
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 3635

UNCLAS QUITO 000543

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION REVIEWS CLIMATE CHANGE AND
CONSERVATION IN GALAPAGOS

¶1. (U) Summary: A delegation from the House of Representatives Committee on Science and Technology led by Brian Baird (D-WA) visited the Galapagos Islands from June 13-16, 2008. The group met with scientists and officials to learn more about global climate change and invasive species on the Islands. End summary.

¶2. (U) Other Representatives included Darlene Hooley (D-OR), Ben Chandler (D-KY), Robert Inglis (R-SC), and Frank Lucas (R-OK). The group met with scientists from the University of Washington conducting climate change research, officials from the Galapagos National Park (GNP), the mayor of Santa Cruz Island (largest population center), scientists from the Charles Darwin Research Station, and representatives from five non-governmental organizations working in the islands. They also presented a grant from USAID to a local women's cooperative bakery.

DOCUMENTING EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

¶3. (U) Codel Baird accompanied a scientific team to Floreana Island to witness the sampling of soil sediments that will be used to map historical climate change over the last 5,000 to 12,000 years. The project is unique because existing historic climate data in the equatorial Pacific are from single locations, or cover only short, discontinuous periods. The project is led by Dr. Julian Sachs, Professor of Chemical Oceanography from the University of Washington, and Dr. Gabrielle Rocap, Professor of Biological Oceanography.

¶4. (U) Floreana Island is one of only two locations in the Galapagos where the soil samples are located. As part of the study, the team will also collect samples from equatorial locations in Palau and Kiribati. Officials from the Galapagos National Park (GNP) accompanied the group to Floreana, and while they had approved Sachs's research program, they commented to the Codel that after witnessing the demonstration they had a much greater understanding of how El Nino effects could be measured through the sediment samples and how these may give clues to future weather patterns.

COMBATING INVASIVE SPECIES IN GALAPAGOS

¶5. (U) In separate meetings with GNP Acting Director Sixto Naranjo, Executive Director of the Charles Darwin Research Station Graham Watkins, and their staffs, the Codel learned about ongoing efforts to protect the islands' native and endemic species from invasive species such as goats, cats, fruit flies, and blackberry bushes, among others. They also discussed the Galapagos' status as a UNESCO endangered world patrimony, problems with island governance and migration control, illegal fishing, and tourism development. The group toured the giant tortoise restoration program, and also learned from park naturalists about how drastic changes in weather conditions (such as the El Nino rains and shift in ocean temperature in 1997-8) have had severe consequences for the Galapagos'

endangered wildlife.

¶6. (U) All representatives expressed interest and concern about the effects of climate change in Galapagos, and in particular, Mr. Baird appeared eager to show U.S. support for the continued study of climate change and for protecting unique species in Galapagos.

¶7. (SBU) Representative Baird and Representative Chandler, who serves on the House Appropriations committee, suggested that they will consider requesting an earmark of up to \$3,000,000 for conservation in the Galapagos and for scientific conferences in 2009 celebrating the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth, the 150th anniversary of the publication of "On the Origin of Species," and the 50th anniversary of Galapagos National Park and the Charles Darwin Research Station.

¶8. (U) Traveling party has cleared this message.

JEWELL